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C O N F I D E N T I A L KINGSTON 002150

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STATE FOR WHA/CAR (RANDALL BUDDEN, BRIAN NICHOLS)

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KCOR, JM, XL, XK

SUBJECT: JAMAICA: OPPOSITION PARTY'S ORIENTATION ON KEY
ISSUES; EARLY NATIONAL ELECTIONS?

REF: KINGSTON 2020

Classified By: Ambassador Brenda L. Johnson, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary and Conclusion

1.(C) Across a broad spectrum of issues - from Venezuela and Cuba to trade liberalization, market-driven development, anti-corruption efforts, and Iraq - the orientation of the Opposition Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) remains more consonant with U.S. policies than that of the ruling People's National Party (PNP). The JLP's popular appeal may soon be put to the test: its Leader Bruce Golding says he expects Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller to call national elections before Christmas.

End Summary and Conclusion.

Venezuela and CARICOM

2.(C) Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM) and Poloff met privately on the morning of Oct. 30 with Leader of the Opposition Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) Bruce Golding, Party Chairman Karl Samuda, and Leader of Opposition Business Senator Anthony Johnson. Golding began by inquiring about the ongoing contest between Venezuela and Guatemala for a seat on the UNSC, and asked whether a compromise candidate might emerge to break the deadlock. DCM observed that, while the U.S. was not overtly attempting to engineer any particular outcome, it was no secret that Washington opposed Venezuela's gaining a seat. Golding then stated flatly that he had disagreed with the position taken by the Government of Jamaica (GoJ) from the beginning; instead of backing Venezuela, CARICOM should have looked for a compromise candidate. He would prefer that CARICOM "distance ourselves" from the anti-U.S. position of Chavez. While Jamaica and Venezuela historically had enjoyed close relations, Chavez was a different matter; he was "not convinced" that CARICOM's close relations with Chavez would not have a "negative impact" on relations with the U.S. DCM observed that, in light of the serious issues with which the UNSC would be dealing--from nuclear proliferation to international terrorism and Darfur--CARICOM's position was a disappointment. If Venezuela were to gain a seat on the UNSC, while it would not have veto power, it nevertheless could disrupt business and prevent formation of consensus in the deliberations of important committees.

Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI)

3.(SBU) Golding then pointed out that, in some quarters, the USG's recent requirement that U.S. citizens visiting the Caribbean hold valid passports had been interpreted as a result of the region's "dalliance with Chavez." DCM assured him that the eleventh-hour exemption granted by Congress to facilitate travel across U.S. land borders and on cruise ships had had nothing to do with Venezuela. In response to Golding's and Samuda's assertions that the U.S. passport requirement would cause serious damage to Caribbean tourism, DCM noted that:

-- the most recent GoJ study had found that approx. 90 percent of current U.S. visitors to Jamaica held valid passports (post will provide a copy to Golding and Samuda);

-- overall U.S. passport issuances had accelerated significantly in recent years, and passports were valid for a full ten years;

-- by requiring travelers to have passports, the U.S. was merely bringing itself into line with accepted international practice;

-- post-9/11, aviation security was on the cutting edge of the global counter-terrorism effort, and any reprieve from the passport requirement for international air travelers would be only temporary--the requirement definitely would take effect.

Golding then derided the GoJ's efforts to prepare for the new passport requirement as "dilatatory": there had been no program to ready the tourism industry.

Counter-terrorism, APIS, and Security

4.(SBU) Samuda then asked how the U.S. viewed the threat of terrorism in the Caribbean. DCM confirmed that Washington was very much aware of the threat, and noted that Secretary Chertoff recently had signed the Advance Passenger Information System (APIS) Agreement with CARICOM countries in Port-of-Spain. The U.S. and Jamaica would continue their traditional close cooperation in law enforcement, security, and counter-narcotics.

International Trade

5.(U) Turning to international trade, Samuda expressed deep pessimism over the Doha Round, and claimed that U.S. and EU agricultural subsidies were "holding us back." DCM noted that the respective positions of the U.S. and EU differed substantially: Washington's most recent proposals for mutual reductions of agricultural subsidies had been quite reasonable, but unfortunately the EU had been unwilling to accept them. Reductions must be equitable to overcome resistance from domestic agricultural lobbies. In response to Samuda's inquiry regarding the status of FTAA, DCM acknowledged that, for the moment, progress was "on hold"; nevertheless, the U.S. continued to pursue liberalization at the global, regional, and bilateral levels.

Millennium Challenge Account (MCA)

6.(U) Golding and Samuda said that Jamaica and the Caribbean had "suffered" because of Washington's "shift of emphasis" toward other regions since the 1980s. DCM replied that the shift had not been away from the Caribbean, but rather toward assistance in which recipient countries took more direct responsibility for setting and achieving concrete socio-economic results. Under the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) program, recipient countries had to meet

specific criteria. Jamaica currently was under consideration as an MCA threshold country; more progress was needed in anti-corruption, law enforcement, and immunization efforts. The Embassy would continue to work closely with Jamaica in these areas; DCM offered to provide more information concerning MCC.

Remittances, U.S. Immigration, and Iraq

7.(U) Johnson then observed that, in recent years, remittances from North America and Europe had become a major factor in Jamaica's economy, but that they were being used primarily to pay for consumption of imported goods. The country enjoyed unprecedented reserves of foreign exchange, but they were not being used productively; a future JLP Government would explore ways to use remittances to enhance productivity. He asked for information on projects or programs in other regional countries in this regard; DCM said we would pass this request on to Washington. Samuda then inquired concerning plans for construction of a wall along the U.S.-Mexican border. DCM noted that at several points along the border barriers already were in place; consideration of an additional barrier was simply part of a larger ongoing national debate over immigration reform. Golding then asked whether Iraq had become "an albatross" for the U.S. and U.K.: how much legitimacy did the current Iraqi Government enjoy? DCM replied: "more than any previous Iraqi Government, since it had been freely elected by a 60% margin;" the situation in Iraq was extremely difficult, but not hopeless. (Comment: Golding and Samuda left the distinct impression of genuine sympathy with coalition forces in Iraq; theirs were voices of concern, rather than criticism. End Comment.)

Early National Elections?

8.(SBU) Golding concluded by observing that Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller's intentions with respect to the timing of national elections (which must be held before October, 2007) were difficult to read: "on again, off again, now apparently on again." ((Note: at a JLP rally the evening before, he had enjoined the Party faithful: "Do not allow yourselves to be deceived or deluded into believing that, because of Trafigura (Reftel) the elections will be put off until sometime next year....I confidently expect that when I deliver my Christmas message this year I will be doing so from Jamaica House as Prime Minister of Jamaica." End Note.)) Golding did not elaborate as to why he now believed that elections were imminent.
Johnson